NATIONAL BLACK CHURCH INITIATIVE
www.naltblackchurch.com
P.O. Box 65177
Washington, DC 20035
202 • 744 • 0184
dcbci2002@gmail.com

"Bringing people together to serve humanity"

July 15, 2014

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: GN Docket Nos. 14-28 (Protecting and Promoting the Open Internet); 10-27 (Framework for Broadband Internet Service)

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) – a faith-based coalition of 34,000 churches comprised of 15 denominations and 15.7 million African Americans dedicated to advancing social justice – respectfully submits this letter in support of an open Internet. NBCI believes the Commission has ample authority to enforce open Internet rules under Section 706. A flexible regulatory framework promulgated under Section 706 authority will promote the consumer protections and innovation that the Internet has already garnered without harming broadband adoption and investment. NBCI strongly endorses initiatives that reduce disparities caused by the digital divide and encourages investment in broadband networks, particularly within low-income, remote rural, and underserved urban communities.

High speed Internet for all Americans – regardless of race or socioeconomic status – is a moral and constitutional right. NBCI believes the Commission should rely on its existing Section 706 authority to finalize the open Internet rules and then promptly turn its focus to

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policies that prioritize initiatives that decrease the digital divide. NBCI recognizes the important role that an open Internet has had, and continues to have, in stimulating our economic and societal growth. While NBCI agrees that providers should be prohibited from intentionally restricting the quality, content, and equal access to information that define broadband usage, NBCI is concerned about broadband adoption and the persistent digital divide, issues which are being pushed to the wayside as the Commission continues with this proceeding. All citizens require access to a high-speed broadband connection to fully participate in the economic, educational, and civil facets of our society. Too often, low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately lack the wealth, education, resources, and digital literacy skills necessary to take advantage of evolving opportunities and, as a consequence, are left behind. We urge the Commission to create and enforce policies that do not stifle the engagement of these groups but rather foster their meaningful participation.

As NBCI has explained in previous statements, there is an employment and wealth gap in this country that disproportionately impacts racial minorities.[1] We cannot allow this gap to grow. As more jobs, information, and services move online low-income and minority communities are much more likely to be productive members of society if they have access to the technology and the skills to harness these opportunities. Imposing outdated common carrier

[1] *See* National Black Church Initiative States Position on Net Neutrality and Broadband, Press Release, available at http://www.naltblackchurch.com/technology/pdf/net-neutrality.pdf (last visited July 14, 2014).

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regulations on communities and consumers whose livelihoods are determined by their ability to connect to digital resources will lead to further isolation and a deepened digital divide.

The Pastors that are members of this nationwide initiative, therefore, urge the Commission to stay within the realms of Section 706 authority to ensure an Internet untethered by the harms of online discrimination and the lack of transparency. We also implore the Commission to refocus their priorities on those public policies and programs on those issues that advance universal deployment and broadband adoption.

Sincerely,

Rev Anthony Evans

President

National Black Church Initiative

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Rev. Edwin L. Jones, Ph.D.
Faith Christian University Church

Rev. Dr. Cynthia T. Turner
Dayspring Community Church

Rev. Amos Ballenger
Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Rev. LuEllA Rodgers
Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Rev. John Norman
Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Rev. Omar Buchanan
Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Rev. Everett Harris
Mt. Zion Baptist Church

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Mt. Zion Baptist Church

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Word Of Truth Church

Rev. Rodney Blackmon
Christian Unity Baptist Church

Rev. Alex L. Lambert
St. Paul Baptist Church

Bishop Harry Carter, Jr.
Zion Baptist Church

Dr. A.H. Mark Dean
All For Jesus Scripture Art

Dr. Anthony Mays
Breakthrough Bible College

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Rev. Aubrey C. Lewis, Pastor
St. Luke Baptist Church

Rev. Dr. Rudolph White, Pastor
New Southern Rock Baptist Church

Rev. Queen Shepherd, Pastor
Powerhouse Ministry International

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Family Fellowship Church

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Guildfield Baptist Church

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Associate Minister

Rev. Milton R. Baker
Christian Faith Center Ministry, Inc

Rev. Ruth Sutton
Guildfield Baptist Church

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Rev. Wilbert & Dolores Gray
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Rev. Larry Phillip McCray
Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist

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All For Jesus Scripture Art

Dr. Anthony Mays
Breakthrough Bible College

Rev Marcus Lattman
First Baptist Church

Elder Willie R. Hunt
New Community Church of God In Christ

Rev. L.D. Williams
Divine Prosperity Baptist Church

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Blessed Word of Life Ministries

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